

The Circuit Writer



NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

Northern New Jersey Conference, The United Methodist Church

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BICENTENNIAL NOTES

New Jersey Methodists

and the

American Revolution

From the beginning of the Revolutionary War some Methodists, both ministers and layfolk, associated themselves with the struggle for independence by active participation in the war effort. THOMAS WARE, a native New Jerseyan, enlisted as a youth of eighteen in 1776. Later he became one of the most honored and influential of Methodist preachers. His autobiography, which was first published in 1839, includes a brief statement of his experiences as a Methodist Patriot.

"When the struggle commenced, my uncle (with whom he was then living in Salem, N.J.) was on the side of America. But on the Declaration of Independence, he changed sides. Influenced by (opposite) views and feelings...I left him, and volunteered as a soldier in the service. In seventy-six, I was one of the nine thousand quartered at Perth Amboy.

"After I had enlisted, one said to me, 'You are an adventurous youth--it is a desperate cut--independence or the halter?' All seemed at first to agree in dispensing with such articles as were taxed, in a way, as they thought, to oppress the colonies. But they were not equally united in having recourse to arms in defense of their alleged rights. The chief difficulty seemed to be, a fear that we should not be able to contend with a power which we had been accustomed to consider invincible; and then, to those actively engaged in the conflict, it would probably be death instead of independence. This, I doubt not, led many to take neutral ground. But on such ground circumstances would not long permit them to remain. All who professed to occupy it were represented as disaffected, and constantly pressed on the subject until many became really so, and went over to the enemy. Others pleaded conscientious scruples against bearing arms, and were excused on that account, though their property was laid under requisition to support the war. Having now abjured my king, and taken up arms against him, I had time to think and reason with myself on the part I had taken in this great national conflict; and some of my reflections I can never forget while memory lasts. The cause I held to be just. On this point I had no misgivings. But whether we should be able to sustain our ground, appeared to me a much more doubtful question. There must be, I was sure, much hard fighting, and many valuable lives sacrificed, to gain the boon of our independence, if we should succeed at last. And what will they gain, thought I, who fall in the struggle? The thanks of their country? No; they will be forgotten. But then the principles for which we were contending, it appeared to me, were worth risking life for. Our example would be followed by others, and tyranny and oppression would be overthrown throughout the world. Still the question recurred, 'Can you meet the martialled hosts of the British nation--you, who know little or nothing of the arts of war, and whose officers know not much more than yourselves--with any hope of success?' This was an appalling view of the subject. Yet, with the views I entertained of the justness of our cause in the sight of Heaven I could not doubt, and resolved for one on liberty or death. 'But there is a hereafter,' was suggested to my mind. True, thought I, but I will do the best I can, and trust in God. And so it

NEW JERSEY METHODISTS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION - Continued

was, that as a soldier in the army I was more devout than when at home; and I prayed until a confidence sprang up within me, that I should return to my home and friends in safety, or not be cut off without time to make my peace with God.

"After we had lain a short time at Perth Amboy, to make a show of our strength, as was supposed, our general reviewed us in full view of the enemy. As was expected by some, they opened their artillery upon us. Had their fire been directed with skill, many must have been slain. But they shot over us. Although none were injured, yet many were dreadfully frightened, and indignant at the officers for unnecessarily exposing their lives to such imminent hazard. This was indeed a useless exposure of life. To call out nine thousand men in full view of the enemy, and before their cannon, with only a narrow river or sound, not exceeding, I think, two hundred yards, between them and us, was an indiscretion sufficient to alarm the soldiers. Still there was occasion enough to exercise us. Having been a lieutenant in a juvenile company and taken much pride in studying the tactics of the field, I thought our officers blameworthy in neglecting to drill their men, unprepared as they appeared to be for the discharge of their duty. But instead of this, they permitted them to spend their time in running foot races, wrestling, jumping, etc. By an inadvertent remark on this subject, I came near getting into a serious difficulty. I said our officers undoubtedly depended more upon our heels than our arms, alluding to our being indulged in running and jumping, rather than trained to duty. For this I was reprimanded, and threatened with an arrest."

--Thomas Ware, SKETCHES OF THE LIFE AND TRAVELS OF
REV. THOMAS WARE. New York, 1839, pp. 28-31

After being quartered one month at Perth Amboy, Ware volunteered to reinforce Washington's forces on Long Island. That battle ended in a defeat, the surrender of New York to the British, and a bitter retreat across New Jersey to the Delaware. On the way Thomas Ware took sick and left the army to recuperate.

After the war was over Ware was "converted" and joined the Methodists. In 1783 he was called by Bishop Asbury to assist the preacher on the Dover (Delaware) circuit, beginning a long and distinguished career in the ministry. In 1787 he volunteered to go as a "missionary" to Tennessee. In 1791 he was appointed to Wilmington, Delaware, during the intervening years having traveled over a large part of Tennessee and North Carolina, making many converts. For one quadrennium (1812-1816), by election of the General Conference, he served as Assistant Book Agent and was stationed in New York City. In 1825 he retired, but continued to supply Salem church in the West Jersey District until his death March 11, 1842.

Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE

FLANDERS: Records of this historic church were gathered together by church historian Margaret Erikson and have been microfilmed for safe keeping. The joint project was sponsored by the church and the Historic Sites Committee of Morris County.

HACKENSACK: Dennis Collins is at work securing photographs of as many pastors of their church as possible. In working through the church's records plus the records in the Conference Archives at Drew, Mr. Collins reports that he has located photographs of more than half of their pastors who served the church during its 125-year history.

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE - Continued

PORT MORRIS: Port Morris Church got a medal and held a celebration in October! The dollar-size silver medal commemorating the church's centennial depicts the roundhouse that once housed the iron horses of the DL&W railroad. In 1875 Port Morris consisted of about 20 families, all employees of the railroad. There was no church until Miss Mary Mills obtained permission from the DL&W to use an unoccupied machine shop in the rear of the roundhouse for a chapel. In the spring of 1876 the railroad built a church for the people of Port Morris and even provided a bell taken from an engine, and the hand rails that lead to the locomotive's cab became the altar rail. The bell still calls the people to worship and the same altar rail serves the church.

RIDGEFIELD PARK: A celebration of 85 years of Methodism in Ridgefield Park was held October 5. Dr. Eldridge Campbell, a clergy son of the church, preached at the celebration. The Rev. Richard W. Capron is current pastor.

OTHERS? THIS IS A REGULAR COLUMN in our newsletter. If your church is planning a bicentennial or other anniversary celebration or preparing a history, please contact the editor and give us your story!

METHODIST HISTORY magazine

Have you heard of the official historical publication of The United Methodist Church called **METHODIST HISTORY**? Now in its 14th year of publication this quarterly magazine explores every facet of our church history and is available at a very nominal cost. The January 1976 number includes three very special articles:

"Francis Asbury and Thomas White: Refugee Preacher and His Tory Patron", by James W. May, Candler School of Theology, gives us new insight into the perils and uncertainties experienced by Methodists during the Revolutionary War.

"John P. Ingerslew and the Bast Case", by Donald C. Malone, discusses the life and ministry of a Danish minister, social worker and Bishop.

"Your Daughters Shall Prophesy; Feminism in the Holiness Movement", by Lucille Sider Dayton and Donald W. Dayton. In the words of the editor: "I do not know of anything like it in feminist history. It challenges a general assumption that the holiness tradition has always been conservative on women's issues."

This magazine should be in every local church library: \$5.00 for one year
\$8.00 for two years

Order your subscription from:

METHODIST HISTORY
Commission on Archives and History
United Methodist Church
P.O. Box 488
Lake Junaluska, North Carolina 28745

LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY CONTEST - Awards to be presented during 1976 Conference!

Four local churches (Elizabeth, Park Church; Broadway; Little Falls; and Washington) have submitted histories of their churches published during the calendar year 1975 for our third annual Church History Recognition Contest sponsored by your commission. Two awards will be presented during the 1976 meeting of the Conference in June, 1976.

If your church has already published or plans to publish a history of your local church in 1975, we urge you to enter it in the contest. Large or small, pamphlet or hard-bound, mimeographed or printed, all histories produced during 1975 are eligible. Each history will become part of the Conference's permanent collection. MAIL ONE COPY TO: Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe, Drew University Library, Madison, New Jersey 07940 by February 1, 1976.

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SERVICES AND RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP ON HISTORIC OCCASIONS
compiled by Dr. Kenneth E. Rowe. Important for planning
bicentennial services.

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE METHODISTS, by Jesse Lee.
Facsimile reprint of the 1st edition of the 1st
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